

rich here. Add together the averages, and we're still talking about poverty level income for a family of four.

The coalition of disability groups points out that the unemployment and disability programs were designed for different purposes and for the most part serve different populations. But there is an overlap estimated at about 117,000 of the 8.9 million Americans receiving disability, according to Rebecca Vallas of the National Organization of Social Security Claimants' Representatives, a leading advocacy group.

These are people who have passed through the very stringent gauntlet necessary to qualify for disability benefits, and they've also worked long enough to become eligible for unemployment. There's no justification in law or logic for offsetting one benefit by the other.

Vallas and other advocates are especially nervous that this sort of proposal encourages lawmakers to view Social Security benefits as a "piggy bank" to pay for other social programs. "It's death by a thousand paper cuts to call this a pay-for" to cover the expansion of unemployment insurance, she says.

But the idea is becoming disturbingly common in Washington. The disability-unemployment offset also appeared in President Obama's 2014 budget proposal, which called it a "smart reform . . . (to) root out duplicative or wasteful spending." (The budget hasn't been passed.)

It's anything but a "smart reform": it's a hacking away at the safety net for the disabled and unemployed that only a Scrooge would contemplate. The very idea that we should bill the disabled to pay for benefits for the jobless suggests that our national standards of fairness and civilization have fallen very, very low indeed. This is a proposal that should die in its crib.

Mr. HARKIN. Mr. President, with that, I yield the floor and note the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

#### MORNING BUSINESS

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to a period of morning business, with Senators allowed to speak for up to 10 minutes each.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

#### VERMONT ARMY NATIONAL GUARD

Mr. LEAHY. As the longtime co-chair of the Senate National Guard Caucus, I have the honor of advocating for the amazing men and women of the National Guard and of supporting their role in protecting our Nation, both at home and abroad. It is always a great pleasure for me to be able to point to the men and women of Vermont's own National Guard as an example of everything the National Guard does right. This weekend, a battalion of the

Vermont National Guard was honored with the Army's prestigious Valorous Unit Award for their service in Afghanistan. I recognized the achievements of this acclaimed unit last week here in the Senate.

I ask unanimous consent that an article from today's Burlington Free Press commemorating the award ceremony held January 12 in Norwich, Vt., and the amazing service that led to the award be printed the RECORD.

There being no objection, the material was ordered to be printed in the RECORD, as follows:

[From the Burlington Free Press, Jan. 13, 2014]

COMMENDED FOR COURAGE: GUARD UNIT, COMBAT MEDIC HONORED FOR ACTIONS IN AFGHANISTAN

(By Sam Hemingway)

Three years after the Vermont Army National Guard concluded its largest deployment since World War II, 600 members of the mountain infantry contingent were given a Valorous Unit Award on Sunday for their service in Afghanistan.

"You served in a very hostile area," Brig. Gen. Brian Carpenter told the soldiers as they stood in formation during a ceremony at Shapiro Field House at Norwich University in Northfield. "For a unit to be recommended, as you are, takes tremendous leadership."

The award, the second highest award a military unit can receive, honored the combat performance of the 3rd Battalion, 172nd Infantry while it was carrying out its 2010 mission in Paktya and three other provinces in eastern Afghanistan near the Pakistani border.

The unit was attached to the active Army's 101st Airborne Division and stationed at the Herrera and Rahman Kheyl combat outposts and at the Gardez forward operating outpost. The unit is largely made up of Vermonters, but includes soldiers from Maine and New Hampshire.

Also recognized during the ceremony was combat medic Sgt. Michael Mulcahy, who was awarded the Bronze Star for Valor for his bravery during a platoon ambush that claimed the lives of two Guard soldiers, Sgt. Tristan Southworth of Walden and Sgt. Steven Deluzio of Glastonbury, Conn.

Mulcahy who was assigned to the small Herrera outpost in Paktya province, braved enemy fire during back-to-back ambushes near Mullafatee village on Aug. 22, 2010, according to a narrative detailing his exploits.

Carpenter, reading a portion of the narrative to soldiers and attendees at the ceremony, described how Mulcahy "led the way uphill through accurate heavy volumes of enemy fire" in order to reach injured soldiers.

At one point, according to the narrative, Mulcahy used his body to shield a wounded Southworth from heavy enemy fire.

"Mulcahy moved with very little cover through RPG (rocket-propelled grenade) and extremely heavy machine gun fire to . . . Southworth," the narrative said.

After determining Southworth had died, Mulcahy again risked his life to treat another wounded soldier.

Mulcahy, described by a colleague at the ceremony as a "very humble guy" went up to Southworth's parents after the ceremony. The three exchanged long, tearful embraces.

"We are proud to know him," Julie Southworth, Tristan Southworth's mother, said of Mulcahy after the ceremony ended. She said the family had not met Mulcahy previously. Mulcahy told Guard officials he did not want to be interviewed.

Carpenter, speaking of the unit award, said the 172nd Infantry carried out 4,300 combat patrols during the Afghanistan deployment. Twenty-six members were awarded Purple Hearts for injuries sustained during combat, he said.

"Their expertise in bringing decisive combat power to bear on the enemy wherever and whenever needed set the conditions for overwhelming victory and represents a phenomenal effort," the unit award narrative said in part.

The unit also served in the only province where no civilians were harmed or killed during parliamentary elections in 2010. Paktya's turnout for the elections topped 94,000, a 15 percent increase over its turnout in the previous election.

The unit also worked on various economic development and governance projects, and helped train Afghan army, police and medics.

Attending Sunday's ceremonies were U.S. Sen. Bernie Sanders, I-Vt., Rep. Peter Welch, D-Vt., Gov. Peter Shumlin and Lt. Gov. Phil Scott, who had spent the day before as an honorary Guard member. John Tracy, a veteran and Vermont office director for Sen. Patrick Leahy, D-Vt., represented Leahy. All but Scott spoke briefly at the ceremony.

"This is a really emotional day for me," said Lt. Col. Robert Charlesworth, who was based at Gardez and oversaw the 172nd Infantry's operations in Afghanistan. "To finally see these guys and gals recognized for the accomplishments that they had in Afghanistan is very satisfying."

Charlesworth, who now works at the Pentagon as a staff planner with the Joint Chiefs of Staff, said the gains made by the infantry unit in Paktya have mostly held up since the deployment ended.

He said the outposts at Herrera, Rahman Kheyl and Gardez where the soldiers served have been either dismantled or substantially altered since the unit left Afghanistan.

Charlesworth said he's hopeful for the future of Afghanistan as the United States continues to withdraw combat troops from the country and wind down its operations there.

"It's a pretty pivotal moment in history right now in Afghanistan," he said. "We're in the final stages of trying to put together our bi-lateral security agreement with Afghanistan to try to solidify all of the gains we helped the Afghans build over there. I think the next year is going to be critical."

During the course of Sunday's ceremony, one of the soldiers in the unit collapsed as the result of an apparent seizure. The proceedings were halted briefly while several soldiers came to his aid. The soldier, who was not identified, was able to walk under his own power out of the building. Maj. Chris Gookin, the Guard's spokesman, said later Sunday he did not believe the soldier had to be hospitalized.

Two other of the 600 soldiers who stood during the hour-long event also grew faint during the proceedings and were assisted by their comrades.

#### ADDITIONAL STATEMENTS

##### TRIBUTE TO BERNICE JOSEPH

• Ms. MURKOWSKI. Mr. President, today I wish to honor the life and achievements of Bernice Joseph, who committed her life to improving our State through education reform and to ensuring the success of Alaska Native students.

As the vice chancellor and executive dean of the College of Rural and Community Development at the University